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Narratologische Untersuchungen zu japanischen Texten

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INHALTSVERZEICHNIS – TABLE DES MATIÈRES CONTENTS

NARRATOLOGISCHE UNTERSUCHUNGEN ZU JAPANISCHEN TEXTEN

ELBERFELD, Rolf
2004 *Phänomenologie der Zeit im Buddhismus.* Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog.
MEISTER DŌGEN
2001–04 *Shōbōgenzō. Die Schatzkammer des wahren Dharma-Auges.* 4 Bde. Heidelberg-Leimen: Kristkeitz.
ŌKUBO Dōshū 大久保道舟
1969/70 *Dōgen Zenji zenshū* 道元禅師全集. 2 Bde. Tōkyō: Chikuma shobō.

GOTO-JONES, Christopher (Hg.): *Re-politicising the Kyoto School as Philosophy*. London: Routledge, 2008. ISBN 0-415-37237-2, 978-0-415-37237-4. 206 S.

Re-politicizing the Kyoto School as Philosophy could be regarded as a follow-up to Christopher Goto-Jones' *Political Philosophy in Japan – Nishida, The Kyoto School and Co-Prosperity* (2005). In this work, Goto-Jones tries to contextualize the "intrinsically nationalistic" (Jan van Bragt) wartime philosophy of Japan's foremost philosopher and founder of the Kyōto School, Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945), within the wider range of his (pre-war) thought to show that Nishida was not a nationalist but a philosopher of "dissent", "speaking truth to power" against the authorities of an imperialist-militarist Japan. Goto-Jones places his study on Nishida right in the context of the debate on the intellectual participation of the Kyōto School in the Pacific War. This debate was set off in the 1990s when historians of Japanese thought – Pierre Lavelle, Harry Harootunian – first addressed the ideological implications of the philosophy of Nishida and his school declaring that their "political commitment" was to be placed amidst the ideological rhetoric of cultural nationalism. The number of critics of Kyōto School philosophy remained, however, very limited. The vast majority of scholars – Michiko Yusa, Ueda Shizuteru, Bret Davis, Graham Parkes, to name but a few – have tried to depict Nishida and his thought as liberal, multicultural, dissident, etc. In his recent book *Re-Politicizing the Kyoto School as Philosophy*, Goto-Jones does very much the same, even though he claims a more profound approach.[1] He focuses less on Nishida than on a wider range of philosophers (Tanabe Hajime, Nishitani Keiji, Kuki Shūzō, Tosaka Jun)

1 Though not quite: grave methodological inconsistencies, contradictory assumptions and inaccuracies in *Political Philosophy in Japan – Nishida, The Kyoto School and Co–Prosperity* make it formally as well as philosophically a rather poor document of Nishida apologia.

which students of modern Japanese intellectual history ought to appreciate. The variety of topics and range of contributors, however, does not spare this book a positioning within the frame of Kyōto School apologia. Before I discuss the book's crucial shortcomings, I shall first point out some of its less problematic features – its formal aspects:

This anthology, published in the *Routledge/Leiden Series in Modern East Asian Politics and History*, classifies nine contributors – historians of Japanese thought, philosophers, religious scholars – into three sections: "Framing the political philosophy of the Kyoto School", "Political concepts in the philosophy of the Kyoto School" and "The Kyoto School and traditions of political philosophy". Although I find it difficult to distinguish the political concepts applied by a certain group of people or "school" from the tradition it was created in, this classification of various aspects of the Kyōto School's political thought may make sense regarding its complexity. It is of advantage that each author is introduced with a short note on his/her background, which adds a bit of personal colour. Furthermore, students of the history of Japanese thought will be glad to know that the appendix supplies an index of names and keywords.

While reading *Re-Politicizing the Kyoto School as Philosophy,* I could not help but think that one really ought to write a book about the *discourse on* the Kyōto School's philosophical involvement in the militant Japanese state of the 1930s/40s. In fact, that discourse should become a topic in a long overdue debate on *how to debate*. The details: the early 1990s critics of the Kyōto School's authoritarian ideology have meanwhile been silenced or – considering Graham Parkes' "fascism from the left"-reproach, that did not grant leeway for rational debate, – have, understandably so, preferred to remain silent.[2] Indeed, the McCarthy-esque rhetoric against historians of Japanese and Buddhist thought, namely Pierre Lavelle, Bernard Faure, Leslie Pincus, Najita Tetsuo and Harry D. Harootunian, left the bystander at the sidelines with some sinister feelings. How much worse must it have been for those actually accused! Today, one can easily claim that the debate is over; the apologists of the Kyōto School won. Or, as James Heisig complacently remarks in the foreword to *Re-politicising the Kyoto School as Philosophy*: "Today, after more than 25 years, the focus of the discussion has begun to shift to larger and more widely engaging problems" expressing his relief on the successful stifling of political criticism that the aforementioned authors had directed towards Nishida, Tanabe or Nishitani.

2 For Parkes' attacks on the critics see PARKES, 1997.

But when one side seems to have successfully concluded a debate, truth and impartiality (suggesting *Wissenschaftlichkeit*) often do not prevail (the *Historikerstreit* in Germany, the totalitarianism debate of the late 90s/early 00s, the case of Heidegger in France and Germany). Indeed, as in the case of the "war on the Kyoto School" (J. Maraldo), the hypothesizing and insinuating philosophical analyses of the Kyōto School's advocates represented in Goto-Jones anthology reveal as much about the critics' *own* ideological implications as the authors'/ texts' they are supposed to investigate. Much insight into this predicament can be gained from the main thesis of *Re-politicising the Kyoto School as Philosophy*: Goto-Jones contends that the existing approaches to the Kyōto School *fail to take it seriously as a school of philosophy* and focus instead "on historical debates about the alleged complicity of the School's members with the Imperialist Regime in Japan." (blurb info). This "shift in the emphasis", which is supposed to encourage "the search for the politics of the Kyōto School *qua* philosophy" (p. xvii), is, however, not as innocuous as it might seem. A question to be raised is: Does the de-historization of (political) philosophy really contribute to taking it more seriously *as philosophy*? To me, this is a very idealist-romanticist and, fortunately, widely overcome appeal: please do not infiltrate the lofty speculation of philosophy with the dirty laundry of *Realpolitik*. Or, if you do, then at least be sympathetic to its cause.

The obsession with 'purity' – of a discipline, here: philosophy – is symptomatic for the advocates of the Kyōto School-thought today as well as for the School's protagonists during the Pacific War. According to the Kyōto School, purity, whether explicit as in Nishida's notion of "pure experience" (*junsui keiken*) or implicit as in all subsequent rhetorics of aboriginality and the enthusiasm for "principles", is the standard for the ontological dignity of a concept. It does not come as a surprise then that the contribution of the Kyōto School's thinkers to actual, "really existing" world politics – the dirty laundry of philosophy – remains poor, if not simply banal. Criticism of the political economy and its categories, the addressing of concrete social problems, an analysis revolving around the notion of freedom, say, are completely absent. Not to speak of a self-reflective thematization of the ideological dimension of the contemporary Japanese state. On the contrary, the main characteristics of Tanabe's, Nishida's, and Nishitani's political thought endorse a historical-metaphysical deontology in which the state is the moral category *per se* and the nation the self-realization of the individual (see for example Tanabe's *Logic of National Existence*, written in 1939), a pre-established harmony is the true force of history (see for example Nishida's *Towards a Philosophy of Religion with Pre-*

established Harmony as a Guide, written in 1944), or self-denial is the way to an enlightened national community (see Nishitani's *Worldview and View On The Nation*, written in 1941). The reader of the texts in question might actually remain unaware of the contemporary wars against China and, subsequently, other Asian nations, were it not for some vague and scattered allusions to the alleged potential of a war to "self-formation" (*jiko keisei*).[3]

Even Goto-Jones himself provides some cautious hints of his own dissatisfaction with the more specific aspects of political philosophy at the Kyōto School. Regarding the way in which a new method of history could be established, he states that "Nishida and Nishitani are rather vague on this issue [...]" and also "naive" (p. 10). Needless to say that this insight does not prevent Goto-Jones from demanding of the Cambridge School, whose dominant Euro-centristic position he criticizes, to "learn a lesson" (p. 15) from those very same philosophers, "*people clearly not ourselves*" (ibid.). What could this lesson be? What are the non-, if not anti-European contributions to political philosophy as embodied by the representatives of the Kyōto School? The reader's expectations are rather high here. Goto-Jones' answers: "The great contribution of the war-time Kyōto School to the history of political philosophy is to call attention to the need for an awareness of them in the history of philosophy" (p. 20): a response undistinguishable from sheer tautology.

The poverty of (this) philosophy aside – I cannot see how contributors such as Bret Davis or Yumiko Iida take Japanese thought *seriously as philosophy*. On the contrary: the argument that Nishitani could not have been a "cultural purist" because his thought draws on Buddhism which is an "international" pheno-menon (p. 30), is marvellously ignorant of the deep ideological complicity of Nichirenism in ultranationalist Japan of the 1930s, not to mention the inherent nationalist tendency of Buddhism which people like Ichikawa Hakugen, Brian Victoria and the already disavowed Faure and Lavelle (among others) have pointed out. To take something seriously means to take the problematics it raises into account. Although Davis states that his "analysis [...] aims to be both critical and sympathetic" and that he wishes to "both throw out the bath water and yet

3 The wide-spread argument that Japan's war in Asian countries was merely a "reaction" against Western colonization and hegemony, and that Japan should have been conceived as a liberating force (see for example Ueda Shizuteru) – which, by the way, was an official statement –, is an incredibly cynical attitude towards people who suffered from the Japanese invasion. This problematic aside: Not once did the Kyōto School philosophers in any of their work express their solidarity with, or show concern for, the peoples their country allegedly "liberated" from Western imperialism.

preserve the baby of [Nishitani's] thought" (p. 26), we are left with the baby *and* a tub full of water.[4] Nothing in his text suggests a symptomatic reading of Nishitani's wartime prose.[5] Iida, too, gets immersed in the terminology of the wartime ideologues to such an extent that her contribution reads like an extension of Nishitani's *Sekaikan to kokkakan* (Worldview and View of the Nation). Although she tries to distance herself from the subject of her investigation ("Nishitani endorses/emphasizes/sees/argues", pp. 88–89), her language betrays her sympathy for the Kyōto philosopher: not once in her re-narration of Nishitani's onto-theology does she make a critical comment. Ironically, by doing so, Iida certainly does not take Nishitani's philosophy seriously.

It is Graham Parkes who has found his vocation in "standing up" against "attitudes in the contemporary academy", as he calls them. Again the inclination arises to ask *who represents* the contemporary academy when dealing with the Kyōto School. Parkes does not elaborate on this problem but he prompts the reader to feel an urge to "do something about it".[6] After all, the legacy of the Kyōto School philosophy is at stake here, and Parkes is prepared to put some things at risk. These things, however, are crucial for an analytic and balanced discourse. Let me present the details.

Unlike Goto–Jones who acknowledges the problematic of nationalism in the Kyōto School context, in Parkes' bizarre vision, Nishida and the national aesthetic Kuki Shūzō are depicted as "definite internationalists" (the qualifier reveals the degree of his certainty regarding this declaration: he is not sure himself). Although this sounds consequential – Rolf Elberfeld maintains that Nishida was an advocate of "interculturalism" (and forgets to mention that

4 The idiom of "throwing out the baby with the bath water" has been widely used by the advocates of Nishida philosophy such as Yusa Michiko. What Davis and she forget, though, could be summarized by Slavoj Zizek's critical understanding of the idiom: "that the water was originally pure, that all the dirt in it comes from the baby. What one should do, rather, is to throw out the baby before it spoils the crystalline water with its excretions, so that, to paraphrase Mallarmé, *rien que l'eau n'aura eu lieu dans le bain de l'histoire.*" (ZIZEK, 2008).

5 A "symptomatic reading" according to Louis Althusser ideally exposes the "unsaid" of the text and focuses on issues the text omits, excludes, and/or includes. Its aim is to uncover the ideological function of a text, thereby rejecting meaning as self-evident, "natural" or restricted to the author's intention. Especially in the case of the Kyōto School's wartime writings, this seems not just an optional but a very useful strategy.

6 One cannot help but feel reminded of examples in recent history when a similar rhetoric was used to phantasmagorically invent an "enemy" that something had to be "done about". Parkes doesn't seem to mind the association.

"interculturality" can very well co-exist with an ultranationalist agenda)[7] – Parkes goes a step further. His motivation is not, e.g., a "context"-reading or the weak apology of the censorship-argument.[8] He goes right to the other extreme by arguing that the Kyōto School thinkers stood for a radical anti-war, anti-nationalist, yes, internationalist position. It makes one wonder whether he will not end up arguing that Tōjō Hideki was, in fact, a liberal democrat. Ironically, the arguments by which he tries to convince us of Nishida's "internationalism" – "[...] each nation displays its own distinctive characteristics, and contributes to world philosophy" (p. 164)[9] –, his strong rejection of imperialism can be found in war minister Araki Sadao's and even in Tōjō's own terminology: "It is entirely superficial to consider Japan a militaristic or imperialistic country. Such an idea can only be had by someone who does not know Japan takes up arms only in the struggle for peace."[10] And in Tōjō Hideki's view, "Japan had set itself to create in Greater East Asia 'governments which would be in accordance with the desires of its inhabitants, as was the government of Manchuko.'"[11] Similar statements can be found in Nishida's work *The Principle of the New World Order* from 1943.[12] Even though it is evident that Nishida was far from

7 ELBERFELD, 1999.

8 This argument states that Nishida and his fellow intellectuals of the day were under incessant pressure from the government officials to write according to official state propaganda. This is clearly not the case. Nishida as the foremost philosopher of the Kyōto School was himself involved in organizations such as the Shōwa Research Association (*Shōwa kenkyūkai*) founded in 1933 and the Research Group on National Policy (*kokusaku kenkyūkai*) which both supported the government's ultranationalist agenda. He also had the extraordinary honor of winning the Cultural Medal (*bunka kunshō*), the highest official academic decoration, in 1940, and was invited to give the so-called "New Year's lecture" (*gokōsho hajime*) in front of Emperor Hirohito in 1941. He had a deep and friendly personal relationship with Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro who valued Nishida's thought and considered it for his own policy. One ought to ask whether or not Nishida himself was actively involved in compiling the very criteria for censorship. Considering his commitment to the work of various official think tanks as well as his personal connections to state officials, not to speak of his reputation as a highly respected scholar, the question ought to be raised again. No doubt, Nishida was the state philosopher of ultranationalist Japan *per se*. For an informative overview of Nishida's personal political activism, see KRACHT, 1985.

9 NISHIDA, 1992:141.

10 ARISAKA, 1996:91 (footnote).

11 Ebd.

12 "The idea of each nation/people realizing itself while transcending itself to form one world does not negate or slight [the characteristics of] each nation/people. On the contrary, it is by each nation returning to itself and affirming its own world-historical mission, and by uniting

supporting a "racial" understanding of the nation, his Emperor worship and universal conceptual hypostasis of "Japanese culture" as "(absolute) contradictory self-identity" establishes him as a representative of the ideological narrative of cultural nationalism.[13]

Taking the thought of the Kyōto School *seriously as philosophy* also requires a minimal understanding of the philosophy one disavows by way of comparison, here, the Western (European) tradition. In Graham Parkes' article, this insight is missing: "[…] there is a tendency in Western philosophy to think of [the human self] as some kind of mental substance (Descartes' idea of *res cogitans*, a thinking thing, is *paradigmatic*), as something independently subsistent; whereas for the East-Asian traditions the self is regarded as empty of any inherent 'nature' and as relational through and through." (p. 162). Whether Descartes had really thought of the *res cogitans* as "independently subsistent" is highly questionable. It is less questionable, though, that this simplistic dualism could have been avoided if Parkes had read and understood some of the classics of post-Cartesian philosophy, for example, the project of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (I refer to the "Paralogisms of Pure Reason" in the *Transcendental Dialectics*), Hegel's dialectics of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* or Marx' and Engels' dismissal of human consciousness as "'substance' and 'essence of Man'" in *The German Ideology*[14] In this argument, the reductionist dichotomy of West vs. East in terms of "different ways of thinking" can easily be refuted: in the "Western" tradition, the idea of thought-as-substance was ruled out after the Age of Enlightenment and finally in Kant, and it is uncertain whether the "East Asian tradition" has not resuscitated the substantialization of consciousness in someone as "paradigmatic" as Nishida in his *Logic of Place*.

Parkes' ideological framework, which attempts to label itself as "single-mindedness", is not unique in U.S. academia. It can also be found in the odd work by an almost obscurantist author, David Williams, whom Parkes excessively quotes. Williams launched the thesis that the intellectuals of the Kyōto

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with other such nations, that a unified world is attained." NISHIDA, 1979:431. Translation by ARISAKA, 1996:103.

13 As Pierre Lavelle has shown in his thorough study "The Political Thought of Nishida Kitarō". See LAVELLE, 1994.

14 MARX/ENGELS, 1932:28 (my translation). It is also symptomatic that Parkes dismisses "Western philosophy" as such without even making a concrete reference to specific texts. The inaccurate "philosophers like Kant or Hegel"-reproach in its unspecificity is revealing the superficiality which Kant and Hegel are met with.

School were "coherent, rational and credible"[15] in their defense of the war. He then celebrates the agenda of Japanese ultranationalism as a justified reaction to the "white race" – Americans and Europeans. His revisionist and racist view has never been taken too seriously, and even Kyōto School advocates like James Heisig only shrug their shoulders. But where Williams is prepared to admit that Nishida et al. *were* nationalists, Parkes gets hopelessly lost in the messy enterprise of proving their internationalism. After labelling Nishida an internationalist thinker, he depicts Kuki Shūzō as, if not internationalist, at least, not nationalist (and thereby forgets his initial plan to inform the reader of the "definite internationalism" of the Kyōto School). Kuki is a good example, indeed, of how disinterestedness in politics, especially in its materialistic form in *Realpolitik*, does not prevent its philosophical assumptions from being highly political, i. e. ideologically representable. But Parkes misses the point. He accuses Leslie Pincus and Peter Dale of a "perversely" unjustified translation of the term "*minzoku*" as "folk" (which suggests a strong racial connotation), when it should have been "people" (the "neutral" term, pp. 165–170). Apart from the unnecessary hostile and aggressive tone against Kuki's critics, Pincus and Dale, the problematic is different. Kuki's direct linking of a political concept like "*minzoku*" (people, race, ethnic population, folk) to an aesthetic concept like "*iki*" (Japanese elegance, *esprit*) is symptomatic of the ontologization, and therefore validation, of a "national spirit" by way of essentialization. Parkes' point is that Kant and Hegel also refer to examples in the German tradition and "no one accuses them of being nationalistic" (p.166) when they talk about art, so why then should Kuki not refer to his, the Japanese, tradition? Apart from not being quite sure whether this is truly the case – I refer to practically the whole project of "postcolonial studies" –, Parkes misses the point again. When Kant discusses art in his *Critique of Judgement* or Hegel in his lectures on *Aesthetics*, they are referring to something completely different than Kuki. Both are very careful not to ontologize a particular aesthetic pattern as the carrier of a national spirit, quite the contrary: Kant writes about beauty, the sublime, and its reconciliatory effect in humans torn between nature and freedom, and Hegel attempts to locate art as a form of the Absolute Spirit within the triad of art, religion and philosophy in its progress through world history. Both Kant and Hegel refrain from "Prinzipienphilosophie", something that Kuki fully embraces with his notion of "*iki*".

To conclude: Parkes certainly abstains from taking the thinkers he reflects upon – Nishida, Kuki and Nishitani – seriously. On the contrary, he commits the

15 WILLIAMS, 2004:17.

typical mistake of all determined anti-"Eurocentrists" – his all-affirmative stance towards Japanese thought repeats the very Eurocentristic approach he so ardently despises: the unwillingness to expose the Japanese philosophers in question to any criticism whatsoever belittles or even slights them. They are rendered *unfit* for criticism, an attitude that expresses the ideological impetus of infantilizing the Other, here, Japan. This double standard establishes European thought as the *true* Master-Signifier in Parkes' ideological universe.

So what can be said about Goto-Jones' claim in *Re-Politicizing the Kyoto School as Philosophy* that the authors compiled in this anthology take the Kyōto School *seriously as philosophy*? Not much, I fear. There are, however, two exceptions. One exception that actually deals with a particular philosophical problematic is Matteo Cestari's article about "The individual and individualism in Nishida and Tanabe". He argues that the sheer abstraction of logicism underlying the conception of the individual in Nishida cannot prevail as an indispensable component of the "nation": "Why must a nation use the individual creation as the medium, if in Nishida's logic the medium cannot be identified with any*thing* in particular, but it must be Absolute Nothingness?" (p. 57). The other exception is Harry Harootunian's most interesting portrait of Tosaka Jun as a "Japanese Georg Lukács" ("Time, everydayness and the spectre of fascism: Tosaka Jun and philosophy's new vocation") in which a previously underexposed aspect of time is interpreted in Tosaka's "desire to unveil what lay hidden [in everydayness and historicism]" through his concern "with revealing the mysterious side of commodity form and the contradictions it sheltered" (p. 108). These are the truly daring philosophical approaches. The tiresome metadiscussions about the relevance of the Kyōto School for world philosophy or Naoki Sakai's surprisingly uninspired (if somewhat still necessary) "criticism" of the East-West-dichotomy do not reflect the philosophical potential that lies in the symptomatic reading of the texts in question. The fact that this potential serves to criticize them undoubtedly proves their relevance. Unfortunately, most of the texts in *Re-politicizing the Kyoto School as Philosophy* have not even come close to this objective. The fate that therefore most probably awaits this book is the ironic turn against itself: not being taken seriously as philosophy.

Elena Lange

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HEIN, Ina: *Under Construction. Geschlechterbeziehungen in der Literatur populärer japanischer Gegenwartsautorinnen*. München: Iudicium Verlag, 2008. ISBN 987-3-89129-532-8. 381 S.

Die 2008 publizierte Dissertation *Under Construction. Geschlechterbeziehungen in der Literatur populärer japanischer Gegenwartsautorinnen* der Literaturwissenschaftlerin Ina Hein behandelt die Konstruktion von Geschlechterbeziehungen in der japanischen Gegenwartsliteratur. Im ersten Teil leistet die Autorin eine theoretische Aufarbeitung der Gender Studies und der japanischen